

SURVEYING TIME: HANNAH DUSTON'S CAPTIVITY NARRATIVE IN THE WORKS OF HENRY DAVID THOREAU

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Abstract

During the turbulent times of Colonial America, skirmishes between European settlers and Native Americans were frequent and in one such incident Hannah Duston was taken captive. Duston and two other captives, Mary Neff, the wetnurse of Duston's late newborn, and 14-year-old Samuel Lennarson, made their escape by murdering and scalping their captors. With hatchet and scalps in her hands, Duston later became a symbol of Puritan America and famous nineteenth-century writers, such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, John Greenleaf Whittier, and Henry D. Thoreau told her story both as a cautionary tale and as a fictional reimagination of Early American life. This article focuses on the ways in which Thoreau, as a travel and nature writer and as a land surveyor, uses Duston's captivity narrative to reinscribe violent deeds within the realm of natural history.

Keywords: American literature; Hannah Duston; captivity narrative; Henry D. Thoreau; natural history.

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1. Introduction

This essay examines Hannah Duston's captivity narrative using Henry D. Thoreau's land surveyor expertise. Relatively recent interpretations of Duston's narrative depart from the cautionary aspect of the captivity narrative and bring new avenues of investigation regarding the problematic moral agency of the captive exerting revenge on her captors (Mingiuc, 2012) and the subsequent memorialization of revenge which denies female agency (McEvoy, 2023). What Mingiuc and McEvoy seem to argue is that an illiterate Puritan woman had been constantly silenced, used, and abused as a symbol of colonial purity and later as an example of American motherhood in part because religious figureheads, such as Cotton Mather and Samuel Sewall, had a hard time acknowledging the colonists' violent actions against Native Americans. In line with this interpretation of Duston's captivity narrative, we offer to analyse Thoreau's take on the matter by emphasising the ways in which his land surveying expertise brings to surface and therefore reconstitute Duston's agency. As we will show, Thoreau's surveying skills help him identify the location of the long gone Duston's house by inspecting an indentation in a corn field.

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Figuratively, as Thoreau can reconstruct a house based on a trace in the ground, so is he able to restore Duston's voice and agency. Inspired by studies investigating Thoreau's scientific knowledge (Schneider 2011; Thorson, 2014; Walls 1995) and land surveying expertise (Chura, 2010; Rațiu, 2013), this essay hopefully contributes to a better understanding of Colonial America by reassessing Duston's story within the realm of natural history.

As the narrative goes (Arner, 1973; McEvoy, 2023), during the turbulent times of colonial America, skirmishes between European settlers and Native Americans were frequent and in one such incident Hannah Duston together with about a dozen of her neighbors were taken captive and 27, including her newborn daughter, were killed. What made Duston's story memorable was the way in which she and two other captives, Mary Neff, the wetnurse of Duston's daughter, and 14-year-old Samuel Lennarson, made their escape: by murdering and scalping ten Native Americans (two men, two women, and six children) and going back to Haverhill down the river in a canoe. As the leader of the group, with hatchet and scalps in her hand, Duston later became a symbol of Puritan America. Working as a surveyor in Haverhill, MA, on Sunday May 12, 1850, Thoreau visits the northwest part of the town in search of the "site of the true Dustin house" (Thoreau, 1906: 7). Much more than the actual day of Sunday, the date bears great significance because on the twelfth day of May, a hundred and fifty-three years before Thoreau's record of his visit to Haverhill, Samuel Sewall, another diarist, gives us probably the closest, that is, direct and unmediated, account of Hannah Duston's story. Apart from the conversion narrative she submitted to her church in Haverhill in 1724 and published by Cotton Mather, a narrative that centers on her captivity – "I am Thankful for my Captivity, twas the Comfortablest time that ever I had" (Derounian-Stodola, 1993: 135)³ – Sewall's note offers the only opportunity to listen to Duston's voice:

Hannah Duston came to see us; I gave her part of Connecticut Flax. She saith her Master, whom she kill'd, did formerly live with Mr. Rowlandson at Lancaster: He told her, that when he pray'd the English way, he thought that was good: but now he found the French way was better. The single man shewed the night before, to Sam Lennarson, how he used to knock Englishmen on the head and take off their Scalps; little thinking that the Captives would make some of their first experiment upon himself. Sam. Lennarson kill'd him. (Sewall, 1973: 372-3)

As M. Halsey Thomas, the editor of Sewall's diary writes, "not everyone was invited to the Sewalls'," which can only attest to Duston's newfound popularity. Moreover, Thomas feels the need to warn Sewall's readers – some of which might have regaled themselves with a shot of whiskey from a female-shaped bottle while perusing

³ Even though one can argue that Duston's voice is audible through Cotton Mather's exhortations – "I must now Publish what these poor Women assure me" (Derounian-Stodola, 1993: 135), Mather seems more concerned with them sanctioning something that is already implied: women can only silently acquiesce whenever men speak on their behalf.

Sewall's journal⁴ – not to be “startled to find the Sewalls entertaining a murderess” and retells Duston's story as a disclaimer (Sewall, 1973: 372-378). Far from entertaining similar thoughts, just six days after Cotton Mather's sermon that set the standard of Duston's public representation and justified her crime,⁵ Sewall busies himself with other, more pressing issues, but most importantly retells, albeit partially, *her* version of the story.

For Sewall, Duston is anything but a murderess, even though he writes bluntly that she killed her master. Instead, he portrays her, generically, as a *guest* to his house and as an *informant*, so that Sewall can alleviate her physical distress by giving her flax and ease her moral suffering by listening to her story. Thus, Sewall's gesture resembles and at the same time parts with Mather's approach. In good Puritan fashion, he uses her as evidence for his political and ideological views, but unlike Mather he does not seem to be interested in typifying, that is, objectifying Duston to such a degree that she is relegated to the function that Mather assigns her to be – that of a silent witness to her own narrative. The change of venue here plays an important role – the Sewalls' household is not Mather's church --, therefore, an almost *public* meeting that takes place in a *private* house, meeting that is in turn recorded in a *private* journal can eventually restore in part Duston's agency. But the entry soon does its best to stifle Duston's agency, for almost unexpectedly (as in fact it was expected in that age) Duston falls back into passivity, as Sewall seems to keep her captive and transfer agency to her master, Mr. Rowlandson, and Samuel Lennarson, who seems to take ownership over the means of their escape. This episode in which Lennarson is the one who “experiments” upon the master becomes crucial in later retellings of the story. As we will shortly show, Thoreau himself picks up the story, but one wonders why it took a young man so long (when Hannah and Mary were taken captives, Lennarson had already been in captivity for more than a year) before he could learn and then apply an experiment that would have saved his life. To a certain degree, then, Hannah's presence, that is, participation becomes crucial to empowering others, but once she performs that, her absence, her silencing, her mute, but threatening representation, with hatchet and/or scalps in hand, becomes the norm that contradicts all evidence.

2. *Surveying in Haverhill*

It so happens, then, that when he visits Haverhill a hundred and fifty-three years later, Duston's absence is so material, as it were, that Thoreau can survey both space

⁴ It is worth pointing out that 1973, the year Thomas edits Sewall's diary, is also the year when Jim Bean distillery releases a bottle of bourbon whiskey in the shape of a woman, a replica of the 1874 statue of Hannah Duston, which had been at the time the very first woman honored by a statue in the United States.

⁵ “[A]nd being where she had not her own *Life* secured by any *Law* unto her, she thought she was not forbidden by any *Law* to take away the *Life* of the *Murderers*, by whom her *Child* had been butchered” (Mather, 1967: 551).

and time at ease. As usual in Thoreau's *Journal*, names, places, stories, buttonwoods, crops, commerce, measurements, ordinary or extraordinary events like children buying a bundle of laths to make a henhouse or oxen being killed by lightning, all are woven together and everything is in place as if on a surveyor's map:

Sunday, May 12, 1850, visited the site of the Dustin house in the northwest part of Haverhill, now but a slight indentation in a corn-field, three or four feet deep, with an occasional brick and cellar-stone turned up in plowing. The owner, Dick Kimball, made much of the corn grown in this hole, some cars of which were sent to Philadelphia. The apple tree which is said to have stood north from the house at a considerable distance is gone. A brick house occupied by a descendant is visible from the spot, and there are old cellar-holes in the neighborhood, probably the sites of some of the other eight houses which were burned on that day. It is a question with some which is the site of the true Dustin house. (Thoreau, 1906: 7)

Thus, in two journal passages approximately two pages long, passages separated by a *hunter* fragment that would later find its way into *Walden* and a Thoreauvian moment about Fair Haven, this first documented Haverhill entry (Thoreau writes in his *Journal* one more time about a visit to Haverhill, in 1857, but he never mentions Duston again) names Duston only once: "Mrs. Dustin was an Emerson, one of the family for whom I surveyed" (Thoreau, 1906: 8).

While this single mentioning can be considered an initial gesture towards a genealogical tree, with hints to a "descendant" that lives in a "brick house" and intimations to Duston's maiden name and possibly to Hannah's sister, Elizabeth Emerson, tried for infanticide and whose execution sermon had been delivered by Cotton Mather just four years before *Humiliations Follow'd with Deliverances* (Mather, 1970: 156-9), Thoreau documents Duston's absence which seems to be present everywhere. Thus, her presence can be located not only in the branches (maybe roots) of the genealogical tree, but also in the "slight indentation in a corn-field" where supposedly the "Dustin house" once stood or in the apple-tree which "is [now] gone."

If arguably *surveying* land (and everything else) is part and parcel of Thoreau's project, then the agglutination of genealogical tree and apple-tree together seems to be the key to reading this journal entry. It is no doubt obvious that in his *Journal* Thoreau far exceeds the work he has been commissioned to perform and, thus, his *cadastral map* becomes the vehicle of *another* type of taxation. Nothing more than a territory to survey, at least in part, Haverhill suddenly becomes, in Thoreau's *Journal*, a map of words that records the coincidence of time and space, thus setting in place the configuration of the living moment that represents more than the visionary moment of acknowledging a violent past barely discernable in a bucolic corn field (Slotkin, 1973).

In Thoreau's passage then absence becomes presence, even when absence itself is twice removed, as in the case of the apple-tree. This short quote mirrors the rhetorical device Thoreau used in telling Duston's story in *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*. Arguably, Thoreau alone can capture the presence that is predicated on absence, undoing the move in which absence (time) is always predicated on presence (space), a move critical for Mather and Sewall, for whom the temporal seems to be based on Duston's (muted) presence.⁶

Nonetheless, Thoreau is not confronted with the question of the "site of the true Dustin house." For him, the site (the sight?) of the house – the house that burned together with eight other houses, the house where Hannah was recovering after childbirth, the house where the family lived, the house that the husband deserted, etc. – is "but a slight indentation in a corn-field, three or four feet deep." This hole in the ground, which has the depth and the apparent size of a communal (familial?) grave, is scattered with occasional bricks and cellar-stones that represent more than the *house-hold* – walls & foundation (& family) – that once stood (and lived) in that place. Moreover, this very hole that re-presents the absent house is the only point of reference for the long-gone apple-tree "said to have stood north from the house."

Unlike some who cannot discern the site of the house in the corn-field and on whose cadastral maps the indentation of the field itself would probably be completely erased, Thoreau seems to be the only one able to recover the trace of the house inscribed in the bricks and the cellar-stones "turned up in plowing." On his map, then, even though the house seems to be the first to resurface, the first to be retraced, it is not the only one. The absent house brings forth the absent apple-tree, whose presence can only be referenced by the trace of the house. But, equally important, the absent house brings back Hannah Duston, while the absent apple-tree brings back the (unnamed) infant whose head was smashed against it. In Thoreau's reading of the story, in his writing of it, and in his mapping of events, mother and child are brought together never to be separated again.

Unlike others who predicate the chain of events on the moment when "they dash's out the Brains of the *Infant* against a Tree," as Cotton Mather puts it, thus implying that the tie between mother and new-born is sealed eternally by the viciousness of the mother's revengeful deed, Thoreau gestures towards a break of that tie and suggests something different. The trace of the house which in turn marks the trace of the apple-tree become conflated in something that Thoreau ambiguously terms "the spot:" "The owner, Dick Kimball, made much of the corn grown in this hole, some ears of which were sent to Philadelphia. The apple-tree which is said to have stood north from the house at a considerable distance is gone. A brick house occupied by a descendant is visible from the spot" (Thoreau, 1906: 7). Whose spot? The spot

⁶ This interplay between presence and absence and between original and replica is also showcased by the *Jim Beam* bottle that commemorates both Duston's deeds and the statue dedicated to her (see note 4 above).

of the house? The spot of the tree? What if this were the “visible spot” of the surveying, the spot from which “a descendant is visible,” but the apple-tree “is gone”? The apple-tree *might be* gone, but “there are people who have lived to say that they had eaten of the fruit of that apple-tree” and when the tree *is* gone no doubt that there are people to have lived to say that they had eaten corn from the field on which the apple tree had grown.

As it will shortly become apparent in the famous passage of Duston’s escape from *A Week*, Thoreau’s narrator, the impersonal “we,” opens up (which is to say, breaks down) even more to accommodate “two white women, and a boy” who “were hurriedly paddling down this part of the river” (Thoreau, 1980: 320). For critics such as Slotkin, mentioned above, or Johnson this encounter is read as part of Thoreau’s meditation on time and transience. The river becomes the “river of time,” the voyage away from Concord is a “journey back to a primeval Golden Age,” and the shores are but “frames” that invite Thoreau’s meditation on the transience of life (Johnson, 1986:54-5). In the analysis that follows, we will explain the type of work that Thoreau set up to perform in reference to Duston’s story which is an example of his larger project of surveying time.

3. *Surveying nature & time*

If arguably this is Thoreau’s larger project (a project whose treatment far exceeds the purpose of this article) let us return to Duston’s story which in Thoreau’s rendering can be read as a type of negative figuration, negative in the sense that absence stands in for presence, is representative for the way in which natural history mourns and remembers its dead. Thoreau tries (and maybe succeeds in) doing the same. The indentation in the corn field where Duston’s house stood, the hole in the ground the size of a grave, is an injury that nature deflects by “perpetually grieving”, which is to say that nature remembers its dead without memorializing them, for a memorial would be the supreme example of absence standing in for presence – the funerary stone that signals a grave which is but a “house” for someone that lives no more. Therefore, nature does not only negate a memorial, which also stands in for death, but death itself. By negating death, which in turn is but the absence of life, then, nature remembers a presence that can never be absent, as it were, a presence perpetually present, albeit in different forms – “Nature does not recognize [death,] she finds her own again under new forms without loss” (Thoreau, 1958: 64).

Consequently, nature does away with *housing* the dead by perpetually commemorating the *living* – the indentation in the corn field, then, is not important because the bricks and the cellar-stones turned up in plowing re-present the absence of Duston’s house; instead, its *crop* is the one that accurately re-presents the presence of the house and, by implication, of the *living*: “corn grown in this hole, some cars of which were sent to Philadelphia.” The hole then cannot be a grave for it grows corn that is harvested and sold and ultimately ingested (even in the form of liquor!).

Similarly, the apple-tree is not a memorial-tree, not only because, as Thoreau writes in his *Journal*, the tree is now gone, but because, he adds in *A Week*, “there have been many who in later times have lived to say that they have eaten of the fruit of that apple-tree” (Thoreau, 1980: 324).

If this is where the story of Hannah Duston ends in *A Week*, the apple-tree, now gone, becomes the trace of a locale from which the surveying of time becomes possible. As suggested earlier, that *spot* from which the house of a descendent is *visible* is in fact the place that, once inhibited, makes perpetual grieving possible – “Could we not grieve perpetually, and by our grief discourage time’s encroachment?” (Thoreau, 1958: 67). Famously, John was Thoreau’s older brother, whose death at a young age made a lasting impact on the author. John was also the companion with whom Thoreau made the boat journey on the Concord and Merrimack rivers. In fact, Thoreau wrote *A Week* while he lived on the shore of Walden Pond as a memorial to his brother. Symbolically, as both the Duston episode and Thoreau’s mourning of his brother show, humans memorialise the departed by constantly grieving and remembering them and by identifying their trace within nature (a boat ride, an apple-tree, an indentation in a corn field). That grief is then the vehicle that sets everything in motion is without a doubt, but what is interesting to note here is that the surveying of time performs to a certain degree what perpetual grieving means.

That is why when he ponders in *Walden*, “as if you could kill time without injuring eternity,” (Thoreau, 1971: 8). Thoreau seems to be implying that the *notch* on eternity’s stick should be both deep enough to sustain an injury that in turn sustains grief and not serious enough (for lack of a better word) to kill the time. If this is the case, as it were, then, the indentation in the corn field that Thoreau surveyed in Haverhill and Duston’s story he re-tells in *A Week* are but notches that “improve the nick of time” and stand, without loss, at the “meeting of two eternities:”

In any weather, at any hour of the day or night, I have been anxious to improve the nick of time, and notch it on my stick too; to stand on the meeting of two eternities, the past and future, which is precisely the present moment; to toe that line. (Thoreau, 1971: 17)

Thus, Thoreau’s *cadastral map* becomes a *temporal stick* on which Duston’s story is but a (top notch) example of the work he set up to do. And this is what surveying time means.

Read this way, Thoreau’s text becomes a map of surveying time only when the reader understands how to position herself in *Walden*, which is to say on the threshold of Thoreau’s cabin on Walden Pond or on the *visible spot* in the corn field at the site of the Duston house or *at* the length of the dead stream of the Merrimack where Duston’s story begins in *A Week*:

The afternoon is now far advanced, and a fresh and leisurely wind is blowing over the river, making long reaches of bright ripples. The river has done its stint, and appears not to flow, but lie at its length reflecting the light, and the haze over the woods is like the inaudible panting, or rather the gentle perspiration of resting nature, rising from a myriad of pores into the attenuated atmosphere.

On the thirty-first day of March, one hundred and forty-two years before this, probably about this time in the afternoon, there were hurriedly paddling down this part of the river, between the pine woods which then fringed these banks, two white women and a boy, who had left the island at the mouth of the Contoocook before daybreak. (Thoreau, 1980: 320)

This is how the story begins and this is how Thoreau begins to do his *stint* – positioned *at* the length of Merrimack on a *Thursday* Thoreau performs the surveying of time. The key (one of many) to this passage is not the light reflected on the river, not even the wind that blows over and makes the bright ripples (which reinforce the intensity of the light, even though the afternoon is “far advanced,” but also the idea that the river might be a pond so the ripples can have indeed “long reaches”); rather, the key is something that comes, as it were, at the intersection (another possible notch!) of light and wind, that is, “the haze over the woods.” The haze, thus, is not only important for the almost impossible figuration of nature’s work (“the haze is like the inaudible panting, or rather the gentle perspiration of resting nature”), but also for a problematic framing of that work in / as “the attenuated atmosphere.” Supposedly, the haze filters both light and reflection; limits the wind; downplays the panting; and contains the gentle perspiration. The haze *attenuates* the atmosphere, and by doing so manages to zoom in on and blur out at the same time the work of nature, haze itself being just another one of nature’s byproducts.

But in the order of things, “the attenuated atmosphere” is but a microscopic strip which, under the right lenses, can reveal the map of the work of nature in its entirety. By implication, in his survey, Thoreau himself works with an *attenuated* version of time – the afternoon – which syntactically breaks temporality while purportedly reinforcing its linearity: “The afternoon is now far advanced.” Even though it signals the present moment, as a predicate whose subject references a period of time (the afternoon), the adverb can never be / become itself the moment it stands for. Moreover, the “now” is qualified with a qualifier (advanced) itself qualified (far), which complicates things even further by continually deferring the possibility of its future actualization: the “now” never was and never will be for it always is. Here space comes into play. But space itself is but another attribute of stasis for in the “attenuated atmosphere” “the river lie[s] at its length.” Or so it *appears* to Thoreau, himself *static* on the threshold of his house in *Walden*, where he writes the book about the boat journey he had with his brother. Perpetual transformation, perpetual grieving, constant stepping outside of the shadow, outside of the personal guarantees the endless ex-static experience of being or, as Thoreau, puts it, since nature can never be imitated, of the capability of being:

I do not wish to see John ever again – I mean he is now dead – but the other whom only he would have wished to see, or to be, of whom he was the imperfect representative. For we are not what we are, nor do we treat or esteem each other for such, but for what we are capable of being. (Thoreau, 1958: 62)

The move from the *I* to the *we*, a move that generates space and time (a move which, albeit complete/d in *A Week* where *we* means *one* and/or *the other*, is ready again for yet another move that would incorporate “two white women and a boy”) is the ecstatic move that makes possible the being of the impersonal *other*, the perfect representative of the *I*. Therefore, if we are not what we are, nor we esteem each other for what we are, it follows that the right estimation, that is the right surveying, would be that of the capability of being, and so, in this sense, Henry and John, Hannah and Mary and Samuel are *capable* of living together on the river of time.

The “drama of the day” (as Thoreau warns the reader immediately before the two previously quoted paragraphs that begin Duston’s story) takes place when “we naturally look more into the day, and so in the forenoon see the sunny side of things, but in the afternoon the shadow of every tree” (Thoreau, 1980: 320). This natural look “more into the day” – “There is more day to dawn” (Thoreau, 1971: 333) – represents, then, the improvement of the nick of time. In addition, the surveying of time is not the surveying of “the day,” but of “more” or “far” as in “far advanced,” which is to say surveying the degree according to which the individual can become natural. Sitting in the shadow of trees simply means *more* shadow, but that posturing in nature’s shadow represents the only possibility of depersonalization, of becoming impersonal like nature herself. This losing of shadow in nature’s shadow is the closest the individual can get to perpetual grief.

But in order to do that, *at* the length of a river that appears not to flow, Thoreau needs space and action to create the time he can then survey, and by doing so, improve its nick. In fact, space and movement, which is to say natural landscape and human action, become the coordinates on Thoreau’s map, because if he were to survey time, he needs to add human movement (from *I* to *we*?) so the individual can step out of her shadow and into the nature’s shadow, which is to say in the shadow of trees that are but “dials which indicate the natural division of time” (Thoreau, 1980: 319). It should be obvious by now that the *dramatic* events that follow are predicated on simultaneous movements and actions whose narration maps Thoreau’s surveying of time.

The constant re-turn that we mentioned earlier, the move back and forth in time and space, the narrative that shifts from past to present only to return to the history book make the text almost an impossible figuration. At great pains to imitate the work of nature that alone can defer the pain of dying by collocating it with the pain of mourning, Thoreau knows that John and Hannah will endure as long as there is no memorial attached to their grave. To be buried in an unmarked grave means the

impossibility of locating the dead, who thus can be found everywhere and nowhere. As a different form of memorial, mourning is without loss when its temporality can be transformed into the space whose mapping and mapped endure as long as mourning does – as if, the dying would be kept alive by the mourner, whose continual mourning far from preventing death, postpones it, so the dying is continually dying. This type of memorialization, then, is drastically different from that of a memorial. A grave with a funerary stone is a marker that stops time and even kills it. On the contrary, a grave without a funerary stone represents a grave without loss as long as the dead becomes the dying and thus kept alive through perpetual mourning. Hence the possibility of the living to be present in the absence of exactly the unmarked grave. Hence the living present as a condition predicated on the recovery of space so that no unmarked grave gets lost. For one last time, one last turn – the perpetual time of the mourning into the unmarked grave of the living.

4. Conclusion

For Thoreau, then, mapping the unmarked grave means mapping the living, whose spatialization is equal to the amount of time needed to mourn them all. Duston's story is but an example of the type of work that such an endeavor entails. What Peck calls the coincidence of time and space turns to be more than that. Far exceeding the narrative convention of the nineteenth century travel literature that postulates "the prompting of historical incident by the fortuitous view," Thoreau does more than taking "the episode of Hannah Duston's escape out of the dead past and recover[ing] it for the living present" (Peck, 1990: 21). First, Thoreau's view is anything but fortuitous and, even though Peck manages to go beyond the conventional treatment of the genre, he continues to treat the view as a revelatory moment dependent on memory and on its capability of entering the past. Like Slotkin, who considers this visionary moment, "a more perfect Indian Wisdom [...] spontaneous, uncerebral, un verbalized expression of the sudden knowledge of the meaning of things" (Slotkin, 1973: 533) when all fall into space and get loaded with meaning, Peck fails to see that Thoreau's *visible spot*, as it were, is not the entry into time (an entry prompted by space), but rather the gate on the way out.

When surveying is done, the visible spot represents the way out into *Walden*, from where Thoreau can begin to trace both time and space back on to the map. On this map then time can never be killed, but only improved, while space itself gets folded and unfolded *at* its length, the size of a gigantic unmarked grave. This is what Thoreau fronts and this is what he ponders once the surveying is done. Both history and nature compete in telling the same story, and while cannot have one without the other, Thoreau seems to be implying that nature is the favorite, for what history forgets, nature remembers. The visible spot then becomes the way out from history and the way into nature.

Thus, Thoreau does not only write Duston's escape – it was her agency first that helped her escape. It was also her agency that put her in trouble. Beginning with Cotton Mather and ending with the *Jim Beam* bottle, her agency constantly erased and emptied her figuration. But ironically her agency brought her closer to the people whose lives she took given the fact that she was buried in an unmarked grave for fear of Indian desecration. While Mather and others did their best to domesticate this closeness – her use of violence was legitimate as long as it saved her life and revenged the death of her baby, but this is a violation that needs to be contained –, they also did their best to desecrate her memory through representations (hatchet and scalps in hand) that distanced her from the domestic model of the Puritan life and pushed her closer to the stereotypical Native American way.

However, this is the only instance when history seconds nature, hence Thoreau's use of time in his narrative. But Duston's unmarked grave is represented on Thoreau's map not according to historical coordinates, but according to natural ones. If this were the only difference between Thoreau's representation and those of the others', then it would be quite a difference. But Thoreau attempts more. In his efforts to imitate nature, Duston's story is but an example of the work Thoreau set up to do, for nature does not discriminate, which is to say, it remembers the dying. Therefore, since her grave cannot be located, there are other means of commemorating Duston than statues or bottles of whiskey.

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